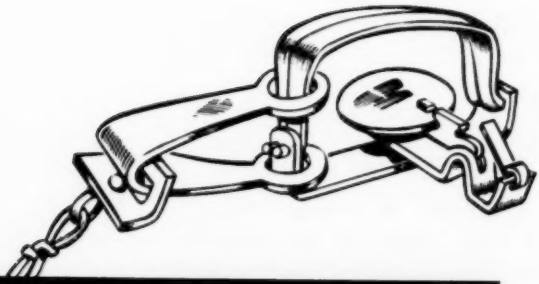
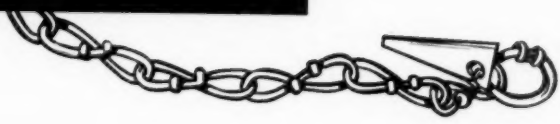
BULLETIN 101
OCTOBER 1953



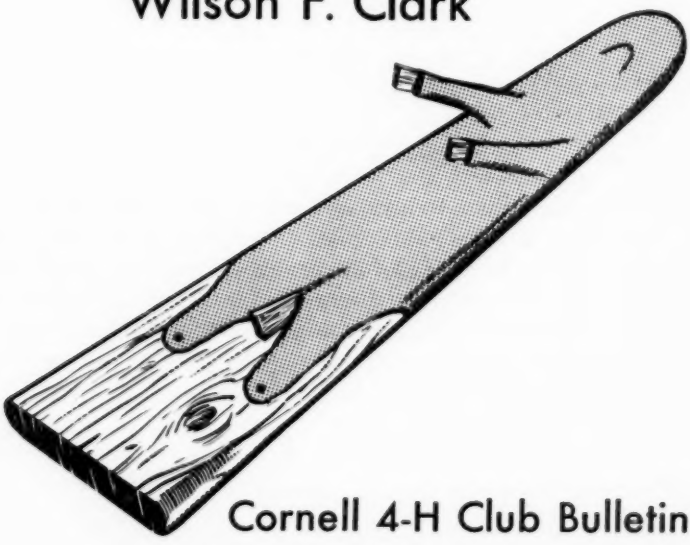
# TRAPPING



# and

# FUR MANAGEMENT

Wilson F. Clark



Cornell 4-H Club Bulletin

A publication of the
New York State College of Agriculture,
a unit of the State University of New York,
at Cornell University

This bulletin is written in keeping with the suggestions of the 4-H Club Agent's Publications Committee. Each main section is followed by questions for discussion and suggestions for 4-H Club meetings. The material is arranged in several lessons as aids for the 4-H Club leaders or the project leaders. The drawings of animals by the late Louis Agassiz Fuertes are used through the courtesy of Professor E. L. Palmer.

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## *Project Requirements*

1. Know the trapping laws and seasons for your part of the State.

2. Read this bulletin carefully to know why, when, and how to trap, and when not to trap.

3. Trap at least *three* different animals from this list:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Beaver** | Opossom |
| **Red fox** | Otter |
| **Gray fox** | Raccoon |
| **Mink** | Skunk |
| **Muskrat** | Weasel |

4. Prepare the three pelts properly.

5. Carry out at least one of the wildlife-management practices given in the management section of this bulletin.

6. Fill out the project record sheet on page 43, and return it to your 4-H Club Agent by September 1.

# Trapping and Fur Management

WILSON F. CLARK

## The Importance of Fur Bearers

TRAPPING is an age-old art. Prehistoric man captured animals for food and clothing by the use of snares, pitfalls, and deadfalls. For generations, trapping was a source of livelihood, and the furs of wild animals have been a staple of commerce for many years. In the United States, the lure of furs, perhaps more than the lure of gold or land, was the real cause for penetrating the wilderness. Trappers, particularly those in search of the valuable and widespread beaver, were the first pioneers. Although they did not till the soil, their explorations set the stage for the agriculture and commerce which followed. Many were the fortunes made in fur. Many were the lives lost, the Indian treaties broken, and the hardships endured — all for the sake of furs.

Today, relatively few people depend entirely on trapping as a means of support. The trapping of wild fur bearers is, however, an important source of part-time income in rural areas. New York, the most populated State in the Union, has a raw-fur business second only to that of Louisiana and larger than that of Alaska.

The New York State Conservation Department in 1940 reported the following estimated catches of fur animals:

*Muskrat*, 335,657; *skunk*, 46,681; *weasel*, 37,500; *raccoon*, 27,751; *red fox*, 27,865; *gray fox*, 8,996; *opossum*, 4,750; *beaver*, 3,000; *bobcat*, 220; *mink*, 10,492.

This raw fur had an estimated value of about $2,000,000. More recent reports on New York catches are not available, but it is believed that current fur "takes" are almost as large. For the United States as a whole, the annual raw-fur catch is estimated to be worth about $75,000,000; and if the value of the industry which processes fur and manufactures fur garments is included, it is evident that the wild-fur crop is of considerable economic importance.

But worth as much or more than the cash from their pelts are the benefits of fur animals in agricultural areas. No one can even guess how much more rabbit, mouse, or insect damage there would be if there were no predatory fur bearers. (*Predatory* animals are those that prey upon and eat other animals.) All of the commercially valuable fur bearers, except the muskrat and the beaver, play an important part in controlling the

abundance of smaller animals. But what of the damage fur animals themselves do? Remember that skunks may raid poultry flocks, or raccoons may ruin sweet corn, or rabid foxes may cause the death of cattle. These, too, are serious problems. No animal is entirely good or entirely bad.

It is difficult to understand and to appreciate the manner in which nature works. Animals depend on and affect each other. All animals, directly or indirectly, depend on plants. And plants, too, both affect and, in some cases, depend on animals. The more you think about this, the more you realize how complex all life is.

A major chore in wildlife management is to try to have enough animals so that we can benefit from the good of each. The control of insects and other small animals, the cash from the sale of furs, the value of hunting both in dollars and in recreation, the food value and enjoyment of wild meat, and (most important) the pleasure and thrill of seeing and studying wildlife – are positive benefits of wild animals.

A second job in managing wildlife is to try to control their abundance to prevent the spread of disease (such as rabies by foxes), damage to orchard or woodlot trees, damage to crops, or the killing of poultry or livestock – all unbeneficial activities of wildlife.

All of us must try to understand both the positive and the negative values of the different wild animals, realizing that what is good in one area may be bad in another. Before you place your first trap, learn all you can about the fur bearers. Then trap wisely, so that there will be annual crops of fur for harvest, everyone may benefit by the valuable services of the fur bearers, and fur animals will always be with us.

### Questions and Suggestions

1. List some of the benefits of fur bearers.
2. List some of the problems that we have with fur bearers.
3. Was the lure of furs important in the early history of the United States?
4. As a club activity, start a chart of animals and plants, to show the ways in which all affect each other. Add to the chart as you learn more about the animals and plants.
5. Show *The Realm of the Wild* (a 16mm., sound, color film available from Cornell Film Library, Roberts Hall, Ithaca, New York).

## Before You Go Trapping

THERE's lots to learn and to do before you set your first trap. There are the trapping laws to learn, equipment to gather, traps to buy and prepare, baits and lures to make or buy, and the animals to study. All your plans and knowledge, as well as your pack, should be ready before the trapping season

opens. If they are ready, both the fun in trapping and the chances of success will be greater.

### Trapping Laws

The conservation laws about trapping help to insure a continuing crop of fur animals. Be sure to check with the County Clerk or local Game Protector about the open season on each animal in your area before you trap.

Purchase a trapping license and keep it with you while you are trapping. If, however, you are under 16 years of age, or if you are trapping on the land on which you live, or if you live on an Indian reservation, you need no trapping license unless you are trapping beaver, fisher, or otter.

There are a number of other regulations as well as the laws about trapping seasons. Be sure to read them in the *Trapping Syllabus* that the county or town clerk can give to you. Of special importance are the laws that require you to visit all of your traps at least once every 24 hours.

### Equipment for the Trapper

To do any job well, you need good equipment and the proper kinds of equipment. This is as true for trapping fur animals as it is for harvesting silage corn.

The equipment listed here is that usually used to trap foxes. Not all of it is needed to trap some of the less wily animals, such as the muskrat or the skunk; but if you have all of these things in your pack, you'll be ready for any of them.

1. A pack basket or some easy way to carry everything.

2. Traps – use the right type and size for the animal you are trapping (page 8).

3. Stakes – hardwood or metal, from 8 to 10 inches long. The trap chain is wired to the stake as shown in figure 1.

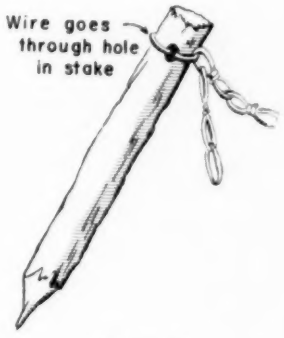



**Figure 1**

4. Pliers and a roll of soft iron stove-wire, to make repairs while on your trap line.

5. Ground cloth – a piece of canvas, about 3 feet square, to stand or kneel on to prevent human scent at trap-site or to hold excess dirt from dirt-hole set.

6. A digging tool – a hand trowel or a large metal spoon.

7. A hatchet – to drive stakes, to break frozen ground, or to build "cubby" sets.

8. Gloves – light cotton gloves are satisfactory. Buy a new pair and use them only for making sets.

9. Bait and lure – buy or make ones that work for you and keep them in tight bottles in a *separate* canvas envelope on the *outside* of your pack, away from the other equipment.

10. A screen – ¼-inch mesh hardware cloth, about 8 inches square, on a light wooden frame, to sift dirt over trap sets.

11. Pan covers of wax-paper or light canvas and of a size to fit inside the opened trap jaws.

12. A few pelt stretchers at home all ready to receive your catch (figures 40 and 41).

13. For trappers who are old enough to have hunting licenses, a .22 caliber rifle or pistol is often useful on a trap line.

### Traps – Sizes and Types

Of the many sizes and types of traps, select the ones that are the right size for each kind of animal. In New York State it is illegal to use traps with an open-jaw spread greater than 6 inches or traps with teeth in the jaws. The number of a trap generally refers to its size or strength; usually the larger numbers are the larger or heavier traps, but each trap company seems to have its own numbering system. The table at the bottom of the page gives trap numbers and sizes from one large trap company.

Five of the many different types of traps widely used are shown in figures 2 to 6.

The single-spring and jump traps may also be bought as "stop-loss" traps. They then have an extra coil spring and wire trap arm added that springs up over the upper part of the animal's leg and helps to prevent "wring-offs."

In general, use the jump traps (either single- or double- underspring) or the coil-spring traps for sets in which the traps are covered. Because of the compactness of these traps, they are usually used in dirthole sets, in most cubby sets, and in some blind sets.

Where traps are not covered, as in many water sets, single-spring or double-spring traps are often used. The single spring No. 1½ and the "stop-loss" traps are most commonly used for muskrats. For catching beaver, No. 3 or No. 4 double-spring traps are favorites.

| *Number* | *Jaw Spread* | *For* |
|---|---|---|
| No. 0 | 3½ inches | Weasels, small rodents |
| No. 1 | 4 inches | Weasel, mink, (sometimes used for muskrat) |
| No. 1½ | 4¾ inches | Mink, marten, skunk, opossum, muskrat |
| No. 2 | 4¾ inches | Fox, raccoon, opossum, fisher |
| No. 3 | 5½ inches | Beaver, coyote, fox |
| No. 4 | 5⅞ inches | Beaver, otter, coyote |

Figure 2

Figure 3

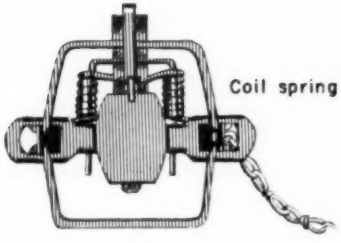



Figure 4

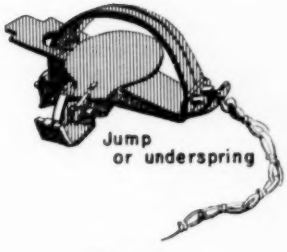



Figure 5

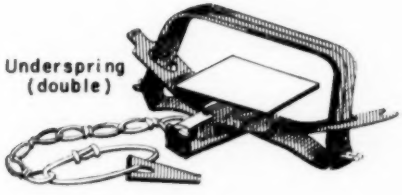



Figure 6

### Preparing the Traps

Traps are like other pieces of equipment – if you take care of them, they last a long time. Treating the traps helps to protect them and removes human or foreign odors. The removal of odors from traps is particularly necessary in fox trapping.

The following method of prepar-

ing traps is one of many ways to do this important job:

1. Adjust the trap trigger so that it works easily. Do not try to set "hair-trigger" traps, because too sensitive a trap is hard to cover, more easily catches birds or other small animals, and often warns the fur bearer by going off before his foot is firmly placed. This often results in catching only a toenail.

2. Remove all rust and oil by boiling the trap in a lye solution for one-half hour. Use about one-half can of lye to 5 gallons of water. Rinse well afterwards.

3. Label all traps with your name and address, *as required by law*. Use small homemade or purchased copper tags.

4. Open the trap jaws slightly by inserting a twig or nail. Place traps, chains, wires, and other metal parts (such as metal stakes or drags) into a large pail.

5. Fill the pail with water, then add any one of the following: soft maple bark, hemlock bark and twigs, white oak bark, sumac berries, or similar natural staining materials.

6. Boil this for about one-half day, or until the traps are definitely "blued." Pour off the water so the scum does not stick to the traps, then hang the traps to dry and cool.

7. Fill a clean pail about half full of water and put it over the fire. Add enough wax mixture (2 parts of paraffin, 1 part of pure beeswax, a small piece of rosin) so that a 1-inch layer is on top of the water when boiling slowly. Paraffin alone will do, but it may not stick to the traps so well.

8. Dip the metal objects (traps, chains, wire) into the bucket of hot water and wax. Leave each there until hot, then pull them out and hang them up to cool. The object of all this is to remove odors and give everything a *thin* protective layer of wax.

9. After the traps are treated, be careful not to get foreign odors on them. Handle them only with clean gloves, and store them away from gasoline, oils, machinery, and barns or homes. Some trappers store traps in clean boxes full of dry leaves and small evergreen boughs.

### Lures and Baits

Lure in a trap set is used to spread the "news" that there is something worth investigating at the set. Bait is used to get the animal to work over the area.

Every trapper has his own favorite baits and lures. Most professional trappers make their own for each kind of animal. For a new trapper, it is best to buy baits and lures from another trapper or from a trapping supplies company. Experiment until you find or make ones that suit you and the places, conditions, and animals you find. In this bulletin, lures and baits for the different fur bearers are described under the discussion of each animal.

### Questions and Suggestions

1. Give at least three reasons why we have trapping laws.
2. Who must have a trapping license?
3. Can you write from memory the trapping seasons for different fur bearers in your area?
4. As a 4-H demonstration, gather your trapping equipment and explain to your club what each item is for.
5. Prepare a 4-H demonstration on traps. Show several types of traps and how each is set. Explain the sizes of traps for different animals, and tell where each type of trap may be used.
6. What are some of the reasons for preparing the traps as described?

## Standard Trap Sets

THERE are hundreds of different trap sets, and each trapper has his favorites. One trapper in his book describes 25 different fox sets. With a few basic sets to start with, you'll soon be thinking and planning new ones.

Many sets are variations of the dirt-hole set, the water set, or the "cubby" set. How to make these three is told in detail in the following paragraphs, and a few additional sets are given in the sections on the various animals.

### Dirt-hole Set for Foxes

When you're ready to make a set, walk to within about 100 feet of the spot selected, put on your gloves, and pre-set your trap. Now continue directly to the spot and get to work. The longer you take, the more chance there is that human scent will be left at the set. Here are the steps to follow:

1. Put down the ground cloth and stand on it. Don't walk around.
2. Dig a round slanting hole about 6 inches deep and 3 inches across. Put the dirt on the ground cloth or throw it far away. (Figure 7.)
3. Dig a circle of sod or dirt from 7 to 8 inches across, and deep enough so that the trap pan will be about ½ inch below ground line. Put this dirt into your wire screen. (Figure 8.)
4. Drive the stake, to which the trap chain is wired, into the center of this area. Put the trap down on top of it, with the chain coiled out of the way. (Figure 9.)

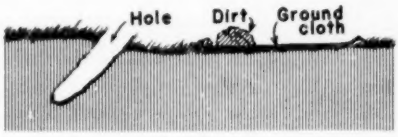



**Figure 7**

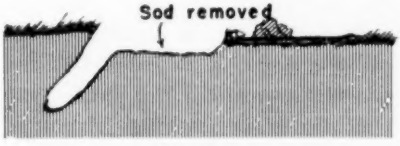



**Figure 8**

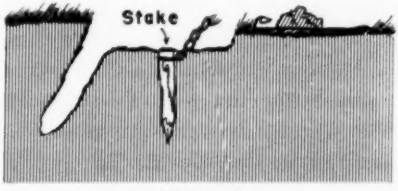



**Figure 9**

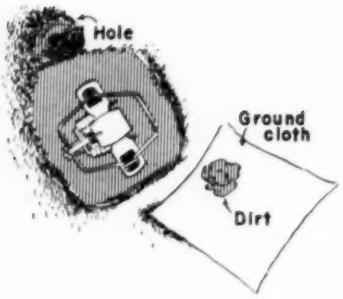



Figure 10

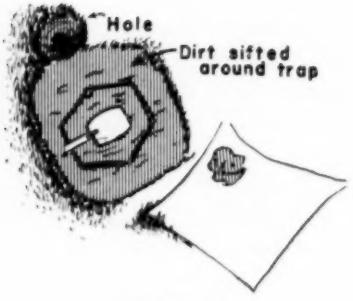



Figure 11

5. Line up the trap as shown in figure 10. Make it sit solidly, so that it won't rock, which would warn the fox.

6. Replace some of the dirt around the jaws, both inside and out (figure 11). Don't let any get under the pan. Sometimes wool, milkweed down, or other soft material is put under the pan to prevent dirt from blocking the pan action. In freezing weather some trappers often use seedless buckwheat chaff in place of dirt.

7. Put the square of wax paper or canvas over the pan. Be sure that the square does not extend over the jaws at any point.

8. Put a couple of pieces of bait at the bottom of the slanting hole, and cover them with a little dirt or grass. Handle the bait with a deodorized fork or wire spit.

9. With the ¼-inch mesh screen, sift dirt over the trap. Use either the dirt you dug out or in freezing weather use ant-hill dirt. Make it look as natural as possible and yet cover the trap about ¼ inch deep. If your trap area slants a little towards the bait hole, water drains off and there is less chance of the whole set freezing.

10. Put *2 or 3 drops* of lure above the bait hole, on the side away from the trap. Use a medicine dropper or a twig dipped into the lure bottle. The completed set is shown in figure 12.

11. When you are satisfied that the set looks as natural as possible, pack up your tools, widely scatter any dirt left on the ground cloth, gently rake the place where the ground cloth was to make the grass stand up naturally, then move along. When you leave your set, continue in your original direction of travel so a doubling back of your tracks or scent will not make the animal suspicious.

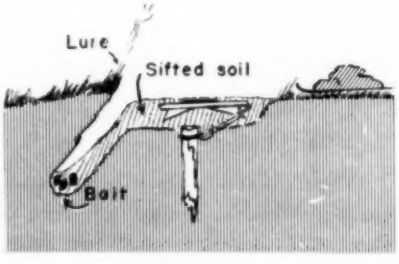



Figure 12

### Two Water Sets

A water set is any set in which the trap is under water. Because water hides trap odors, the questions of scent-free traps is not important. The real problem is to locate the trap in such a way and in such a place that the animal will be caught. Often no lure or bait is used with water sets; they are "blind" sets. Two water sets that are often successful are shown in figures 13 and 14.

**Water set for fox**

1. Find a spring or shallow pool with a constant water level.

2. Sink a rock about 6 inches out from a solid dry bank.

3. Put the trap on the top of the rock, and fasten the chain either to the rock or to a stake driven into the bottom or into the bank. Make the trap sit firmly on the rock, so that the animal is not warned by unsure footing.

4. Cut a small piece of moss or sod, and crop it to about ¼-inch thickness by shaving off the soil. Put the sod gently on the pan; be sure it does not extend over the trap jaws. The water level should be just at the bottom of this sod piece so that the trap is under water and most of the sod is above water.

5. Put another rock and a large piece of sod about 6 inches farther out. Put the lure (2 to 3 drops) and a large piece of bait on this.

The idea is that the fox will step on the trap while trying to reach the bait.

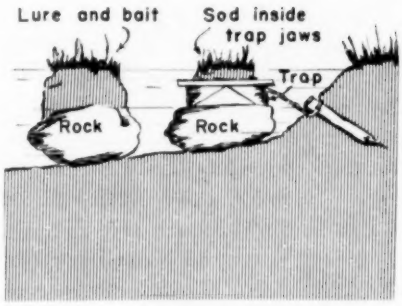



Figure 13

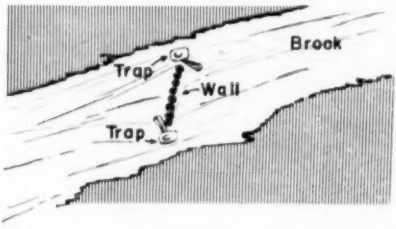



Figure 14

A useful variation of this set is in a brook where a fox trail crosses or might cross. Put a trap on a rock in the middle of the brook and then put a small piece of sod on the pan of the trap. If necessary, place another piece of sod between the trap and the edge of the brook. If the trail actually crosses, no lure or bait is needed. If the trail runs up one side of the brook, put lure on the other side opposite the trap.

In both of these water sets for fox, a drag is often used so the animal will leave the place and not tear things up too much. In a small spring hole, two or three traps may be set around the edges (in the water), with the lure and bait on the sod in the middle.

**Water Set for mink**

1. Along a small stream where there are signs of mink, build a low fence of twigs stuck upright in the stream so the animal will be led around one end. If the stream is stony, a small stone wall will be easier to build (figure 14).

2. Set the trap in water from 1 to 2 inches deep. Do not use lure or bait, and do not place anything on the trap. This is a "blind" set.

**A Cubby Set**

A "cubby" is any covered enclosure in which traps and bait are placed. They are often useful sets for winter trapping, because the traps are protected. There are many variations of this for different animals. Here's one kind that will give you an idea of "cubby" sets.

1. Build a tight enclosure of small sticks stuck upright in or laid on the ground (figure 15). Make the roof of sticks and cover them with leaves, or evergreen boughs if the cubby is in evergreen woods.

2. Place a large bait in the rear of the cubby.

3. Set the trap just inside the open end of the cubby, and bury it as in the dirt-hole set or cover it lightly with leaves.

4. Lure may be used (often is not used in cubby sets). If used, put only 2 or 3 drops on a twig close to the open end of the cubby.

Cubby sets are sometimes open at both ends, with a trap at each end and a bait in the middle. Drags are useful, instead of staking down the trap chain, so that the cubby is not ruined. Many trappers select the places and build the cubbys before the trapping season, so they are all ready for use when the season opens. Cubbys are also made of old weathered boards, old pieces of drain tile, or small rocks.

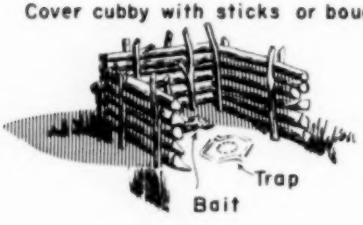



**Figure 15**

**Questions and Suggestions**

1. In making a dirt-hole set for foxes, why is the ground cloth important? Practice making dirt-hole sets in your back yard until you can make one easily and well.

2. In making water sets, is trap odor important? Why or why not?

3. As a 4-H demonstration, show your club's members how to make dirt-hole and cubby sets. Use flats of dirt if you demonstrate indoors.

## The Animals

THE animals described are the most important or common commercial fur bearers in New York State. As a club or individual activity, to help you learn about the animals, make a large chart of wrapping paper. Down the left side,

Beaver

write the names of the animals. Across the top, as column headings, write: *Size, Color of fur, Life-size drawing of track, Location of home or den, Number of young, Gestation period, Main foods, Good habits or features, Bad habits or features, Trapping season,* and *This year's value of pelt.* Fill out the chart as you learn more about each animal, and add more columns of information as you need them.

Figure 16

## Beaver

### Description

Beaver are the largest of the North American rodents, sometimes weighing as much as 60 pounds. They have small front feet and large webbed hind feet, while the tail is naked and flattened horizontally. Beavers are water mammals, living in natural ponds or ponds they themselves create by damming streams.

### Den or nest

Beavers build their dams of branches, mud, and stones, and their "homes," which stick up out of water, are simply huge piles of branches with tunnels and dry

chambers in them. Sometimes they den in the pond banks. The beaver does not use its tail to transport mud, as many persons think.

### Young

Adult beavers mate sometime during the winter. Gestation is about 3 months. From three to four young are born well furred and with their eyes open. After a month in the lodge or "home," they learn to swim and to feed on solid material. Each lodge often consists of the two parents, the young of the previous year, and the young of the present year. Just before the birth of another litter, the 2-year olds leave home, often moving many miles, to start their own lodges.

### Food

Aspen (popple) is the favorite beaver food, although the beaver will take maple, willow, alder, birch, apple, and some aquatic plants. They cut and cache their food for winter in the pond bottom. Beaver dams often back water over useful crop or woodland and sometimes do great damage. Also, in some areas, beaver dams block trout streams, which may prevent trout movements and may cause the water to become too warm for trout.

### Fur

Beaver fur is heavy, lustrous, and dark brown, with a dense underfur. It is valued in the trade, although in the past few years the price has been as low as $10 for a large pelt. A few years ago, large "blanket" beavers brought as much as $60 to $70.

### Trapping

Drowning sets are needed for beaver, because beaver "wring-off" as do muskrats. In swimming, a beaver's front feet are folded against his chest. Keep this in mind, so he is caught by the hind feet or by the front feet when they are lowered.

Beaver are usually trapped under ice. A great variety of sets are used. Some are shown in figures 17 to 20.

A pole is often handy to place traps under water, and is made as shown in figure 21.

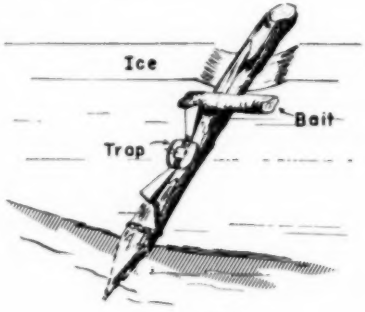



Figure 17

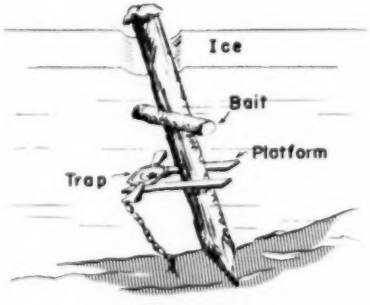



Figure 18

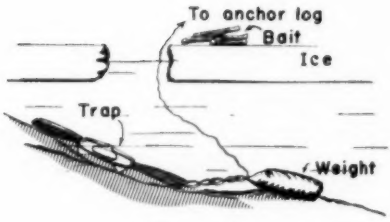



Figure 19

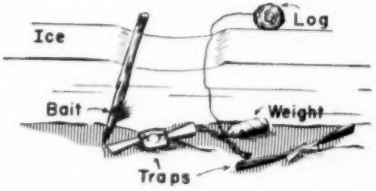



Figure 20

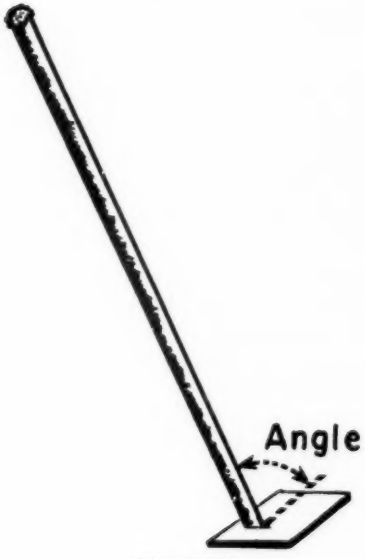



Figure 21

### Baits and Lures

A beaver bait is usually aspen twigs, although apple chunks sometimes work. Lures are seldom used.

Red Fox

## Red Fox

### Description

The red fox is as large as a medium-sized dog. Its nose is pointed, its ears are erect, and its tail is long, bushy, and white-tipped. The fur on the upper parts of the body is reddish yellow, white on the belly, and black on the feet. There are other colors, such as silver and cross, and all may appear in the same litter.

### Den or nest

Red foxes occupy many different habitats, such as rolling farm land, borders of open areas in heavily forested regions, or sparsely wooded areas with marshes and streams. The den is in thin woods or even in open fields, and areas of light or sandy soil are often preferred.

### Young

Adults mate in late winter. Gestation is 51 days. From 4 to 10 young are born in late March or early April. Both parents care for the pups. The family breaks up in August, and the young breed the following winter.

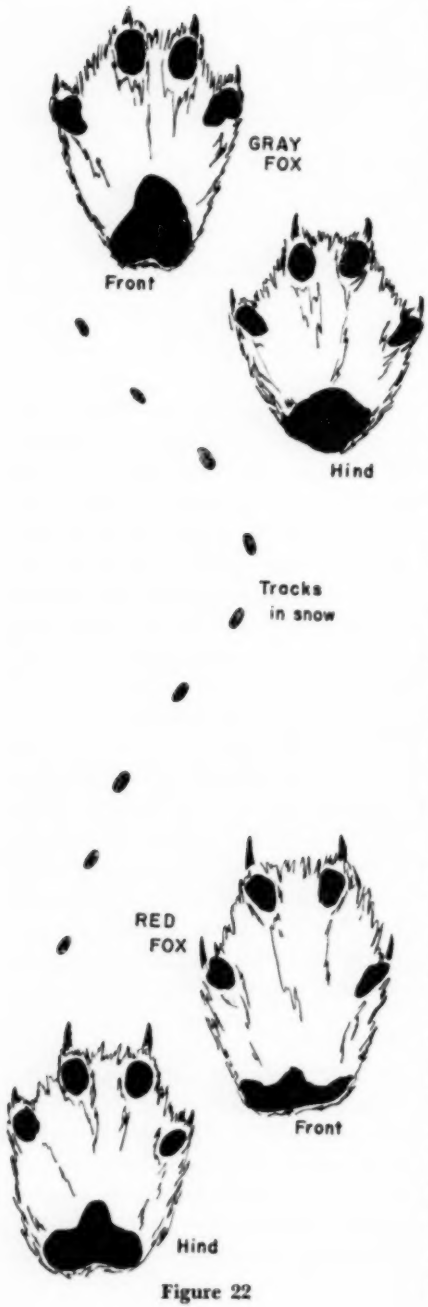



Figure 22

## Food

In the winter, the chief foods of the red fox are mice, rabbits, some birds, carrion, frozen apples, and such berries as it can find. In spring and summer, the fox feeds on woodchucks, rabbits, small rodents, birds, snakes, turtles, and berries; and in the fall, on wild fruits (cherries and grapes), berries, insects, and mice.

## Fur

The fur is thick, with a heavy underfur. Good pelts once brought as much as $30, but changes of fashion have made a fox pelt currently worth only 75 cents or less.

## Trapping

The red fox likes more open and drier areas than does the gray fox. Stubble fields, open pastures, old woods roads, dry stream beds, and wood edges are his haunts. He's extremely trap shy, and care must be used not to leave any human scent at fox sets.

Besides the standard dirt-hole set and water sets for foxes, many more are used. A few (but by no means all of them) are the following:

### Mound set

When built on a mound of earth, an "ant hill," or a small manure pile, this set is somewhat dog-proof. The fox has a tendency to get up on such mounds to better view things. Place the trap on the top of the mound, as in the dirt-hole set. Put a few drops of lure on a twig 6 inches from the trap. You may place the bait near the base and

on the same side of the trap as is the lure. This set is often used with bulk bait, such as a carcass, and the carcass may be put as far as 50 feet from the mound. If a carcass is used, do not use lure or other bait.

**Winter sets**

Winter fox trapping is difficult, and the problem often is to prevent sets from freezing. On windswept ridges you may use dry, fine ant-hill dirt to cover the trap. Waxed paper laid under the trap also helps, and some trappers actually loosely wrap the whole trap in wax paper. A good snow set may be made by burying a trap in snow, directly over a large bait (figure 23). Be sure the pan action is free. Stake the trap, or use a drag on the trap chain. Pile snow loosely over the trap, and put a few drops of fox urine or winter fox lure on top. After making any winter set, brush out your foot prints near the trap.

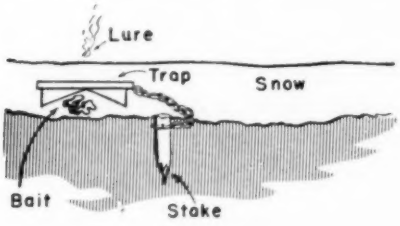



**Figure 23**

**Log set (figure 24)**

Find a log that naturally lies across a stream, and where signs show that foxes are crossing. Cut a notch for the trap, put wet mud on the cut to hide the new wood, place the trap, and cover it with bark, moss, or dead leaves stuck on with pitch. Be sure the covering does not go beyond the trap jaws. Hang the drag over the side, and nail the chain *loosely* to the log. Use a large bait on each bank of the stream, but no lure on or near the trap.

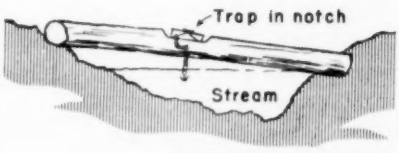



**Figure 24**

**Snow cubby set**

Build a cubby of sticks with inside dimensions of 3 feet long, 1 foot wide, 15 inches high. Close the back end. Place a large bait in the back end, and bury the trap about 1 foot from the bait. Use a drag on the trap so the cubby will not be ruined. Sprinkle fox urine between the trap and the bait (not on bait) and near the entrance. This is a good winter set because the trap is protected. Even if snow covers the entrance, the fox can still find the set and may be less suspicious if he has to open it himself.

## Fox lures

There are many fox lures — maybe as many as there are fox trappers. Buy a lure when you start to trap. After catching a few foxes, you can make your own. The following formula has been successfully used:

To 1 pint of fox urine, add 4 fox glands (from around the vents of 2 foxes), one fox bladder, one fox liver. Grind glands, bladder, and liver. Allow the mixture to stand for 3 months in a clean jar, covered but *not* air tight. Then strain through ⅛-inch mesh screening. For the beginning trapper, it is best to buy a good lure.

### Fox bait

Cut fresh dark meat (such as coon or rabbit) in small cubes, and put it in the ground to age over summer in a covered but *not* air tight jar. Many other baits are used, but the beginning trapper again might better buy a good bait, such as a honey-base bait which does not spoil.

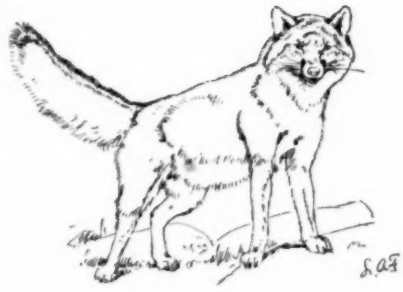
## Gray Fox

### Description

The gray fox is slightly smaller than the red fox, with shorter muzzle and legs. Its tail is long, bushy, and black-tipped; its back is grizzled gray, the sides of the belly and the neck and the inner sides of the legs are red-brown, the belly is white.

### Habits

The gray fox inhabits less open and more moist areas than those used by the red fox. It seems to frequent marshes and dense woods, and only seldom gets into open farm land. It dens in hollow trees or logs or in ground burrows, and can readily climb trees. Its mating season and the number of young are similar to those of the red fox.



**Gray Fox**

### Food

Cottontail rabbits are perhaps the most important food of the gray fox, but he also takes birds, mice, snakes, turtles and their eggs, and a variety of fruits and nuts.

### Tracks

See *red fox.*

### Trapping

See *red fox.*

## Mink

### Description

The mink is a long, lithe animal, with short legs, short head, long

**Mink**

neck, and long, bushy tail. Its fur is soft and lustrous, with long guard hairs. The toes of the hind feet are slightly webbed. Usually the mink is a glossy brown color and its chin is white.

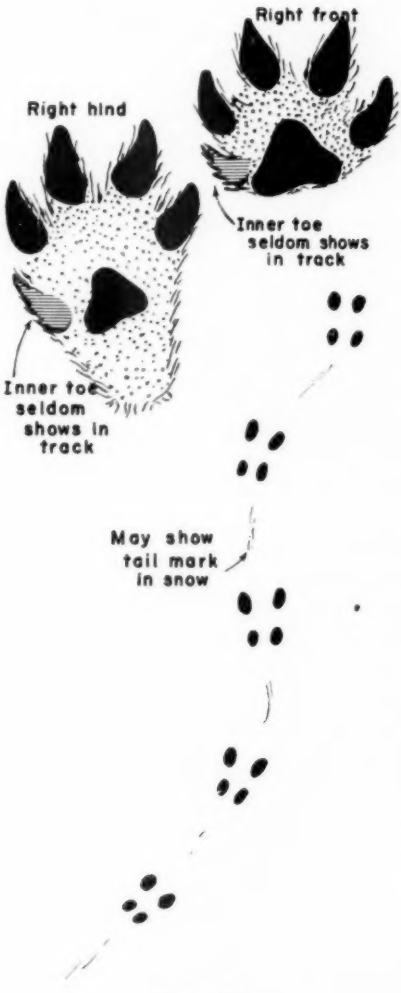



Figure 25

**Den or Nest**

Mink are seldom found far from water. Small streams, marshes, and woodlands bordering water areas are their haunts. They'll den in rabbit holes, under tree roots along a stream, in muskrat lodges, or in natural cavities.

**Young**

Adults mate about late February. Gestation is from 42 to 44 days, and from 4 to 8 small and thinly haired mink are born. The young are weaned at about 5 weeks of age. Both parents care for them, and the family does not break up until mid or late summer.

**Food**

Mink are flesh eaters. Fish, frogs, snakes, some insects, mice, and even the larger muskrats are all fair game.

**Fur**

The fur of this animal is heavy and beautiful, and the pelts wear well. Because of the value of their pelts, mink are heavily trapped.

**Trapping**

Mink are easily over-trapped, so don't try to get every one. They also tend to travel familiar routes, returning to certain places at somewhat regular intervals. Mink frequent water areas and hunt there. For this reason many water sets have been devised. The set with a guide wall (hedge set) of sticks or stones is described under *Standard Trap Sets* (page 14). Here are some others:

**Bait-hole set (figure 26)**

While standing in a stream, dig a hole 6 inches in diameter and 18 inches long into the bank, at water level, so the water will be from 2 to 3 inches deep in the hole. Bait the hole with rabbit chunks, muskrat, or fish. Put the trap about 6 inches inside the hole, and stake the chain in deeper water. Then put a twig with mink lure on it just outside the hole entrance.

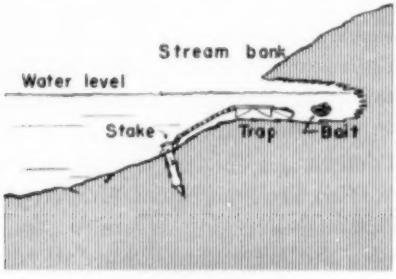



**Figure 26**

**Under-ice set**

Mink often travel under ice, particularly shelf ice. Before freezing weather make a set like the hedge set, but do not put the trap in until the ice shelves. Work from the stream, so human scent is eliminated.

**Snow Cubby set**

Build a snow cubby about 1 foot long, 8 inches wide, and 8 inches high, with the open end towards the water. Put a large bait in the back and the trap in the entrance. Put an evergreen bough over the entrance to keep out snow. You may also use lure on a twig at the entrance.

**Muskrat**

## Description

The muskrat is a large rodent, with short legs and its hind toes partly webbed. Its tail is long, flattened laterally, and sparsely haired over scaly skin. The fur is dense, rich brown in color, and with a very soft underfur overlaid by long guard hairs. The muskrat is our most important fur bearer, because of the numbers taken and the wide uses and treatments of the pelts.

## Den or nest

Muskrats can get along readily on land or water, but are seldom found away from water. Marshes, sloughs, drainage ditches, and slow streams are inhabited by them. They build their houses of cattails and other water plants in water about 2 feet deep. A dry chamber above the waterline is used as shelter and nest. They also use smaller feeding shelters of piled vegetation. Where water is too deep, or soft banks are available, muskrats often den in the bank, digging a hole below waterline and tunnelling up-

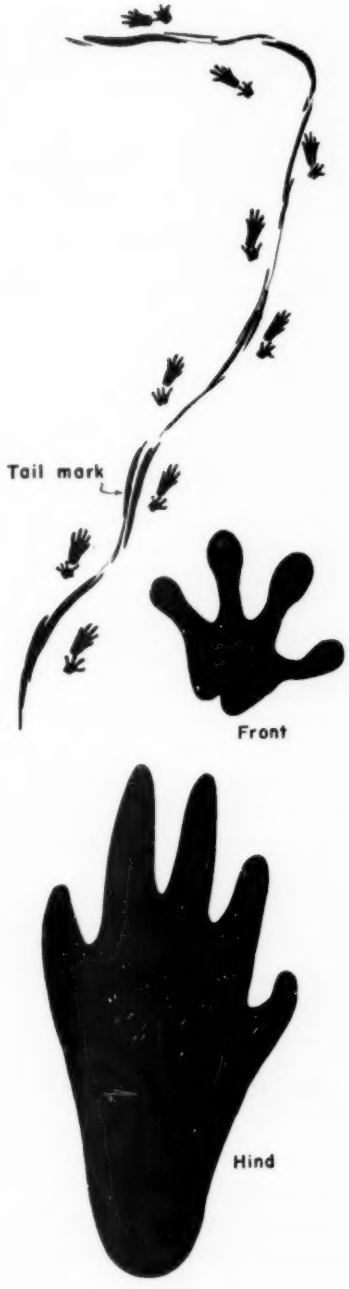



Figure 27

ward to a chamber. Both houses and tunnels may have more than one entrance.

**Young**

Muskrats breed early and often. April or May sees the first litter, after a 29- to 30-day gestation, and in New York there may be several litters a year, with 5 or 6 young each. The young often shift for themselves a month or two after birth.

**Food**

The muskrat is almost entirely a vegetarian, feeding on the fleshy roots and the leaves and stems of many water plants. In New York, cattails are of great importance as muskrat food. Sometimes muskrats invade cultivated lands and do considerable damage. In farm ponds they often cause serious damage to the dikes.

**Enemies**

Unlike most of the important fur bearers, the muskrat has many enemies. Foxes, marsh hawks, and large owls all readily take young "rats," but the mink is the dread enemy. He'll enter the houses and burrows and kill adults as well as young.

**Fur**

Muskrat fur is the basis of the whole fur trade. It can be sheared, dyed, clipped, and treated in many ways, to produce garments sold under a variety of names. Millions of them are taken each year, and their price has been from $1.50 to $2.50 for the past few years.

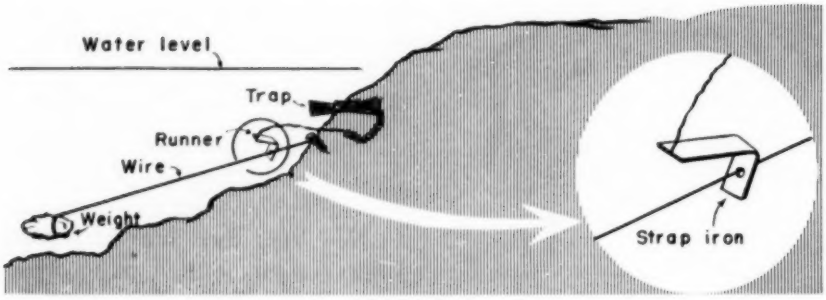



Figure 28

## Trapping

Of primary importance in trapping muskrats is the making of drowning sets whenever possible, since muskrats will often "wring-off". The "stop-loss" traps are also an effort to prevent this. There are many ways of making drowning sets. One is to attach the trap chain to a piece of wire that is fastened to a weight on the bottom. Another is to use a "runner" on a wire, so arranged that it can go only one way—downward, as shown in figure 28. Because muskrats are not at all trap shy, it is not so necessary to conceal traps as when taking other animals, and many "blind" sets are used.

### Trail sets

Traps are often set in trails in feeding areas. No bait or lure is used. Where trails are too far from deep water, use "stop-loss" traps. A good spot for a blind set is where the muskrats climb out of the water onto a trail.

### House sets

*It is illegal* to set traps for muskrats closer than 5 feet from a house, den, or feeding house. This makes good sense, because a muskrat caught too close to a house might cause others to leave.

### Log set (figure 29)

Find a log leaning into the stream where muskrats climb out to feed. If fresh droppings are there, do not use bait or lure. Cut a notch for the trap about 2 inches below water level, and nail the chain to the side of the log, or wire it to a stone in deep water.

Figure 29

### Plank set (figure 30)

Find a heavy plank, 1 foot by 3 feet by about 2 inches. Put a couple

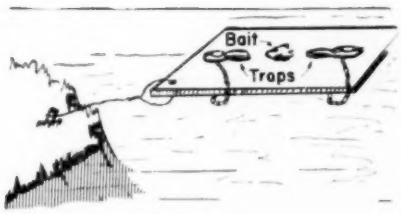



Figure 30

of traps on this, with their chains nailed to the underside of the plank. Cover the traps lightly with water plants, bait with apple or parsnip, and float the plank in the water. Be sure the plank is attached to shore by a wire.

**Under-ice set (figure 31)**

Find where muskrats are traveling under ice. Cut a hole in the ice about 8 inches in diameter. Drive in a notched board or stick at a 45 degree angle, with the trap attached. Sometimes a bait of parsnips is used above the trap. The trap should be about 2 to 3 inches under water, and the chain attached to the pole below the trap.

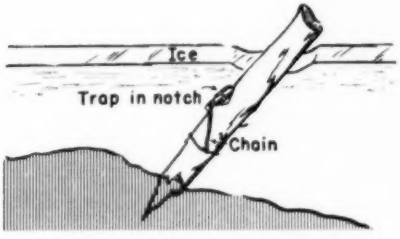



Figure 31

### Bait and lure

Muskrats are often successfully trapped without using bait or lure. If a lure is used, oil of spearmint or oil of anise alone often work. Musk sacs of the muskrat mixed with a little oil of anise is often used. These sacs are one on each side of the belly, near the thighs, between the skin and flesh of male muskrats in late winter and early spring. Baits suitable for muskrats are apple chunks, parsnips, and water plants.

## Opossum

### Description

The opossum is about the size of a large house cat. Its ears are large and naked. The tail, too, is naked and prehensile (used for holding on, like some monkeys). The first toe of the hind foot is opposable (like a thumb) and without a nail. The long over-fur is white and sparse, while the under-fur is black-tipped. The head, throat, and cheeks are whitish. The female has a pouch for its young. Adults weigh up to 9 pounds.

### Den or nest

The opossum builds its nest of leaves in fallen logs, hollow trees, or in woodchuck or skunk burrows.

**Figure 32**

### Young

The young are born after a gestation of only 12 days. The blind, naked, undeveloped young crawl into the pouch and attach themselves to teats. There may be as many as 18 young, but the female usually has only 13 teats. At the end of one month, there are seldom more than 7 or 8 young in the pouch. At the end of about two months, the young crawl out, and often ride on the female's back by clinging to her fur. Probably there are two broods a year in New York.

### Food

Opossums eat most everything — fruit, berries, insects, frogs, corn, worms, and small birds.

### Fur

The course fur of the opossum is used for trimmings. Each pelt is not too valuable, but the large number taken makes the opossum an important fur bearer.

### Trapping

Opossums are not trap shy, and are often taken in dirt-hole sets. Goods places to set traps for 'possum are under culverts or bridges and around old buildings, haystacks, or brier patches. Cubby sets often are successful. Use a cubby 1 foot long, 7 inches wide, and from 8 to 10 inches high and bait it with tainted meat.

## Otter

### Description

The otter is a large aquatic (water) animal. Its head is broad and flattened, the neck is long and stout, the legs are short, with toes webbed, and the tail is heavy, round, and tapering. The fur is deep glossy brown, with lighter fur on under parts of body and head.

**Otter**

**Den or nest**

Otters are usually creatures of the wilderness, frequenting water areas in forest or marsh land. They can swim and dive well, and often create slides in snow or clay banks, apparently just for fun. The otter builds its den in a burrow near water, often beneath tree roots.

**Young**

From 2 to 3 young are born about late April, although the time of mating is not well known. The young, after being weaned, are taught to swim and hunt.

**Food**

The otter is entirely a carnivore (flesh eater), and readily takes fish, frogs, crayfish, and shellfish. Otter are often considered "trout killers." They do take trout when possible but they do not search for trout to the exclusion of other fish. If trout are a stream's main species, then trout is in the otter's menu. If there are few trout but many coarse fish (such as suckers and chubs), the otter relies on the coarse fish for its food.

**Fur**

In the scale of fur durability, otter pelts rank the highest. This durability, plus the rich and beautiful fur, makes the otter a prized animal. Many pelts are exported every year; but evidently the American fashion dictators have not seen fit to give otter their blessings, so it is not used much in this country.

**Figure 33**

## Trapping

Otter are wary, fast, and trap shy. In winter, look for their sign near fast water, deep water, or non-freezing spring holes. If possible, make drowning sets (page 24), and always use a heavy trap, well staked, because the otters are quite strong. (Use No. 4 double-spring or No. 4 double under-spring traps.) A few useful sets are the following:

**Fish set**

Since an otter often follows the same trail in its wanderings, a blind set in the trail is sometimes successful. If this trail is in snow, use wax paper below the trap and on the pan and cover the trap lightly. Use no lure or bait with this set.

**Fish set**

Where there is a sunken log, or against a steep bank, stake a fish in as natural a position as possible by passing a wire through the fish lengthwise. Place traps as shown in figure 34, and use a heavy rock as a trap anchor. The water should be from 18 to 24 inches deep.

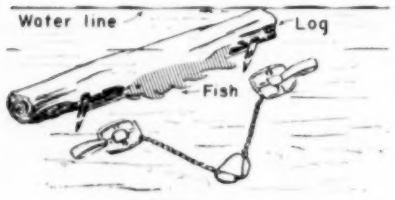



**Figure 34**

**Slide set**

If you are fortunate enough to find an otter slide, make a blind set in the trail the otter uses to get to the top of the slide.

**Log set**

On a log with one end under water, place the trap just below water line. Attach the chain to a weight in deeper water. Put a bait of whole fish, frogs, or crayfish just out of the water on the log.

## Baits and Lure

Otter bait is usually fish or the other animals they eat. Lure of muskrat musk or beaver castor is sometimes used.

## Raccoon

## Description

The raccoon is a medium-sized animal, with a black mask on its face. Its tail is bushy, with from 4 to 6 indistinct darker rings. The fur is long and thick.

## Den or nest

The raccoon lives in dens in hollow trees, in clefts in rocks, in fallen logs, or occasionally in a deserted woodchuck hole. These animals are dormant during winter, but are not

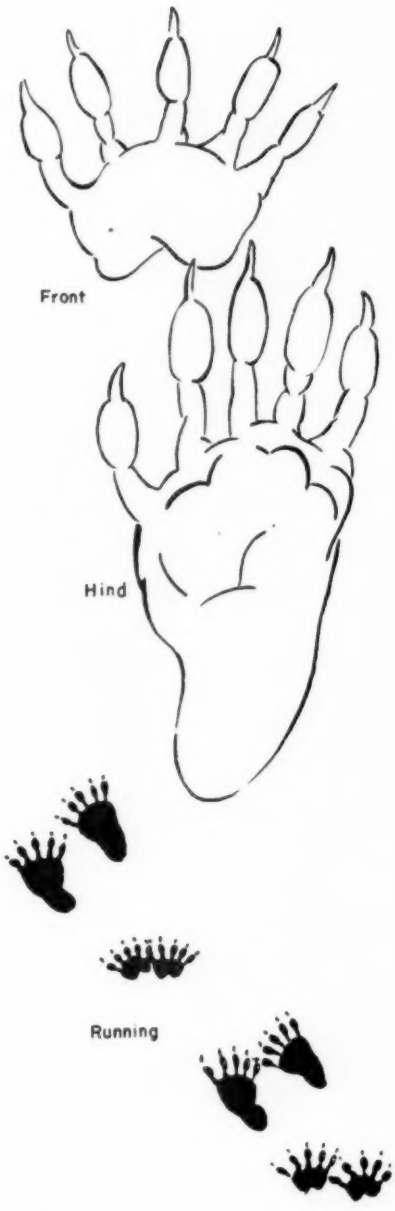



Figure 35

true hibernators and often are abroad on mild winter nights.

**Young**

Adults mate about late January. The gestation period is 63 days, and from 3 to 6 young are born in early April. They are furred at birth, and their eyes are closed for three weeks. The family remains together until late fall or sometimes well into the winter. The young breed in their first year.

**Food**

Raccoons eat almost everything — crayfish, corn, frogs, insects, berries, nuts, and grain. They seldom wash food before eating it in spite of the contrary belief.

**Fur**

The fur is thick, durable, and coarse. Its value is much lower now than several years ago.

**Trapping**

Raccoons are not too trap shy. They are often caught in dirt-hole sets for foxes. The water set for fox may also take raccoons. Since raccoons often work around water, that's a good place to trap for them. A trap put in shallow swift water and with a bright piece of tinfoil on the pan sometimes attracts a raccoon. Cubby sets (1 foot by 8 inches by 10 inches high) at stream junctions, along streams, or at spring flows are often used, usually with strong smelling fish as bait. A good lure is musk of mink or muskrat.

**Skunk**

### Description

Most persons know what a skunk looks like, and recognize it by its odor. The white back stripes are quite variable. The less white on the pelt, the more valuable it is.

### Den or nest

Skunks den in a bed of dry grass in woodchuck holes or in holes they dig themselves. Sometimes they nest under buildings as well.

### Young

The adults mate in mid-February. Gestation is 63 days and from 4 to 7 young are born blind and helpless. The young stay in the nest for six to seven weeks. In winter skunks are somewhat dormant, but they do not hibernate.

### Food

Skunks eat many items, including many mice, May beetles and their grubs, berries, wild cherries, crickets, and grasshoppers. Their value to agriculture is not always realized.

**Figure 36**

### Fur

The fur is thick and was once widely used in garments, but is not now in great demand.

### Trapping

Skunks are not too trap shy. They're often taken in dirt-hole sets made for fox. A cubby set about 1 foot long, 7 inches wide, and 8 inches high is often used, with a large bait in the rear, the trap just inside the front, and the lure between the trap and the bait or outside the cubby.

### Baits and lures

Skunks often are attracted by fox lures, as are raccoons and opossums. A fish-oil lure for skunk can be made as follows: 1 quart of fish oil, 1 ounce of oil of rodium, 1 ounce of oil of anise, ½ ounce of powdered asafetida. Fish oil is made by cutting a fat fish into small pieces and leaving them in a covered but *unsealed* jar in the sun until the flesh "dissolves." The oil appears as a layer on top.

Weasel

## Weasel

### Description

The weasel is a long-bodied, short-legged animal, smaller than the mink. It has a bushy tail and a short blunt head. Its coat is dark brown in summer, with underparts of white. In winter, northern New York weasels are white, with only a tuft of black at the end of the

Figure 37

tail. Weasels on Long Island usually retain their brown fur all year.

**Den or nest**

The New York weasel seems to prefer partly open country, living in farm land and even in outbuildings, and is often found in sparse woods and near water areas. They make their dens in gullies, rock piles, beneath old stumps, or in shallow burrows. The nest is often in a small chamber at the end of a tunnel and consists of the fur and remains of the weasel's victims.

**Young**

Weasels mate in July, but the 4 to 8 young are not born until the following April. Evidently there is a delayed development of the embryos. The young are weaned at 5 to 6 weeks of age and stay with the parents until mid-summer.

**Food**

Small rodents make up the chief food of the weasel, with field mice the most important. Large weasels can handle rabbits, chipmunks, small birds, and snakes; they also eat insects and earthworms. It is commonly believed that weasels suck blood from the necks or bases of the skulls of their victims. Stomach analyses, however, show that weasels usually eat the whole animal, including fur and bones. Occasionally a weasel will do great damage to poultry flocks.

**Enemies**

Foxes, cats, hawks, and owls all are enemies of the weasel. For its size, the weasel is a surprisingly tough customer.

**Fur**

Despite its small size, weasels are used by the thousands in the fur trade, and the white winter pelts are sold as "ermine." Currently, a weasel pelt is worth more than a fox pelt.

**Trapping**

Weasels are not trap shy, like foxes, but they are intelligent, wary animals. Frequently you can catch them in small box sets, cubby sets, or hollow log sets, as shown in figure 38. If the cubbys are small enough, other larger animals will not blunder into the small No. 0 or No. 1 traps used for weasel.

**Box set**

Use an old wooden box, with a 2-inch diameter hole at each end. The box does not need a bottom. The traps are set and staked inside below the holes, and a chicken or rabbit head is put in the center. Cover the box with leaves or boughs.

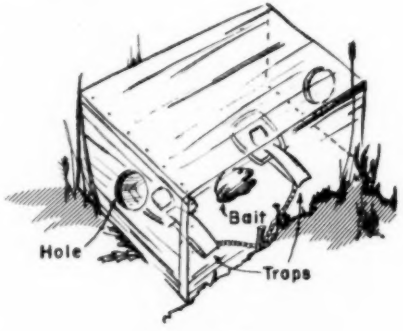



**Figure 38**

**Cubby set**

The cubby set is somewhat like the box set, but is made of sticks or stones, with only a small opening. Weasels may be taken in the common rat trap, using a mouse or small piece of meat for bait.

**Hollow-log set**

Use a hollow log or old boards, bloody bait in center, and a trap on each end.

### Baits and Lures

Weasel bait is usually the fresh meat of any small animal, such as mouse or rabbit. Chicken heads and entrails are often used. One common lure for weasel is simply to drag the bloody bait near the set. Another is made of 1 ounce of fish oil, ½ ounce of powdered asafoetida, and weasel musk glands as obtained.

### Questions and Suggestions

1. Have you made the chart suggested (page 15)? If not, make it soon, as an individual or club activity, for it will help you to learn about the fur bearers.

2. Of the animals described, which has the greatest number of young at the same time?

3. What is a carnivore?

4. What is a prehensile tail? What animal has one? How does it use its tail?

5. A herbivore is an animal which feeds largely on plant material. Which of the animals described are herbivores?

6. For a 4-H Club meeting, ask a local trapper or fox rabies control trapper to talk about his experiences and problems of trapping. Another good speaker would be your local game protector.

## When You Are Successful

WHEN YOU have caught a fur bearer, you have a whole new set of problems. You must kill the animal as quickly and painlessly as possible and skin it. Then you must stretch, clean, flesh, dry, and finally sell the skin. All of these jobs are as important to a trapper as setting his line. Learn the right way to do these chores and do them carefully. If you do not, you waste your time and waste valuable furs.

Different methods are used to kill animals. If you do not use a drowning set, hit the muskrat sharply on the back of the skull. Hit a fox, opossum, otter, mink, or weasel sharply on the bridge of the nose. This knocks the animal unconscious. Then stand heavily on its chest for a few minutes. This stops the heart and lungs from working, and kills the unconscious animal cleanly. Raccoons die hard, and it is often necessary and most humane to shoot a raccoon between the eyes with a .22.

Beaver should be taken in drowning sets wherever possible. Few beaver are caught in non-drowning sets. Skunks are a problem. One way to kill a skunk is to give it a hard, sharp blow across the middle of the

back. This prevents the rear muscles from working. Then stand heavily on his chest.

All of these instructions seem and are cruel. But to be realists, we must wisely use our fur crop and harvest it by trapping. To visit traps once every 24 hours, *as the law requires,* and to kill the animals as quickly and cleanly as possible, reduces this cruelty to a minimum.

### Skinning

If you trap with the idea of selling the pelts, then proper skinning and proper pelt preparation are simply good business.

Fur bearers are skinned either "cased" or "open." In a *cased* skin, the pelt is cut only across the inside of the hind legs (not cut down the belly), and then removed as you "peel" off a sweater. In *open* skinning, the pelt is cut from the vent to the chin (figure 39). In New York State, beavers are the only animals always skinned open. Watch an experienced trapper handle his catch. You'll learn more from him in a few minutes than from reading all the books written on the subject.

The handling of the feet and tails of fur bearers varies, some are left on, some cut off, and some merely split for drying. Also, "cased" pelts are sold either fur side out or skin side out. The table at the top of page 35 will be helpful:

In handling animals whose tails are left on and split, cut carefully down the underside of the tail. Where feet are left on, be sure to cut to the centers of the pads, and cut the toe bones so that all flesh is removed. In skinning the animals, do not tear or puncture the pelt (except where original cuts are made), and be careful and pains-taking in working over the ears, eyes, and lips. Never cut off the head.

### Pelt Preparation

Once an animal is skinned, the next job is to clean and dry the pelt carefully and properly. Cased skins are put on drying boards or

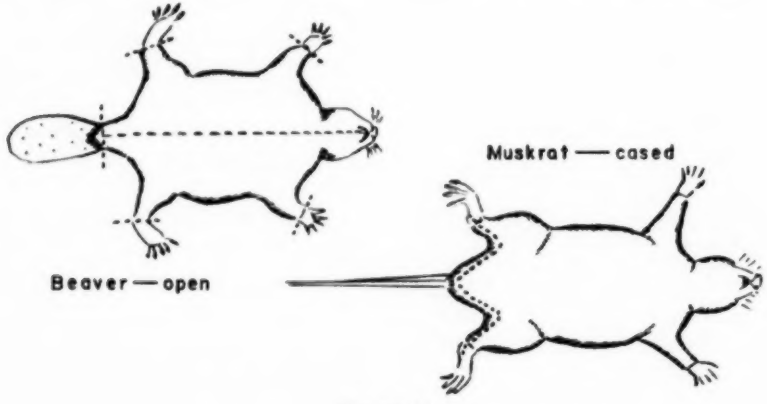



Figure 39

**How to Skin and Sell Different Animals**

| Animal | How skinned | Feet | Legs | Tail | How sold |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beaver | Open | Off | Off | Off | Dry round |
| Fox | Cased | On | On | Split | Fur out or in |
| Mink | Cased | On | On | Remove bone only | Skin out |
| Muskrat | Cased | Off | Off | Off | Skin out |
| Opossum | Cased | Off | Off | Off | Skin out |
| Otter | Cased | Off | On | Split | Skin out |
| Raccoon | Cased | Off | On | Split | Skin out |
| Skunk | Cased | Off | On | Split | Skin out |
| Weasel | Cased | Off | On | Remove bone only | Skin out |

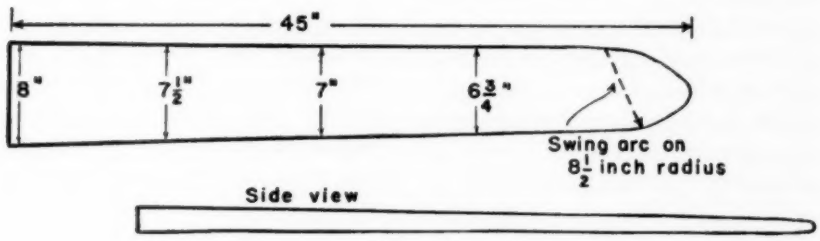



**Figure 40**

stretchers. These stretchers may be of wire (many companies sell them) or of wood (you can make them). Whichever kind you use, be sure the stretcher fits the skin snugly. A stretcher for a medium-sized fox and made from a ½-inch thick board is shown in figure 40.

Sizes for stretching boards are given in the following table. Remember to fit the board to the pelt and not the pelt to the board.

**Sizes of Stretching Boards***

| Animal | For large pelts | | | For medium pelts | | | For small pelts | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Length | Base width | Shoulder width | Length | Base width | Shoulder width | Length | Base width | Shoulder width |
| Beaver | Use oval hoop, about 48 by 42 inches, for all sizes of beaver | | | | | | | | |
| Fox (red) | 50 | 10 | 7¼ | 45 | 8 | 6¾ | 40 | 7 | 5¾ |
| Mink | 35 | 4¼ | 3½ | 30 | 3½ | 3 | 28 | 3 | 2½ |
| Muskrat | 20 | 6½ | 6 | 18 | 5½ | 5 | 16 | 5 | 4½ |
| Opossum | Use small raccoon boards | | | | | | | | |
| Otter | 65 | 9¼ | 7½ | 60 | 8½ | 6½ | 55 | 8 | 5½ |
| Raccoon | 45 | 10 | 8 | 36 | 9 | 7 | 34 | 8 | 6 |
| Skunk | 35 | 9 | 8 | 30 | 8 | 7 | 28 | 6½ | 5½ |
| Weasel | Use small mink boards | | | | | | | | |

*Adapted from *Professional Trapping*, by Walter L. Arnold.

After you have skinned the animal, comb or brush the fur to remove the dirt and burrs. Then put the pelt on a stretching board, skin side out. Do *not* actually s-t-r-e-t-c-h the pelt, but use the right sized board to give a snug fit. Any slight looseness may be taken up by a small tapered piece of wood – but too loose a fit means your board is not large enough.

Spread the tail flat (if it is split), and hold it open to dry by tacking a small strip of screen over it. On pelts where the front feet or front legs are left on, insert a small splint of wood into each leg so the legs will dry properly. How to handle an otter pelt is shown in figure 41.

Clean all meat, fat, and blood from the skin side of the pelt. Cleaning the skin is called "fleshing," and should be done with a dull-edged tool, such as the back of a knife blade or a small board with a chisel-shaped edge.

After the pelt is fleshed on the stretcher, it should be dried. Hang it in a cool, dry place, such as a woodshed, garage, or barn, where rats cannot get at it. *Do not* put salt on the skin. *Do not* hang the pelt over a stove or radiator, because too fast drying causes the skin to become brittle. When the pelts are thoroughly dried, remove them from the stretchers, and store them in a cool dry place until you sell them.

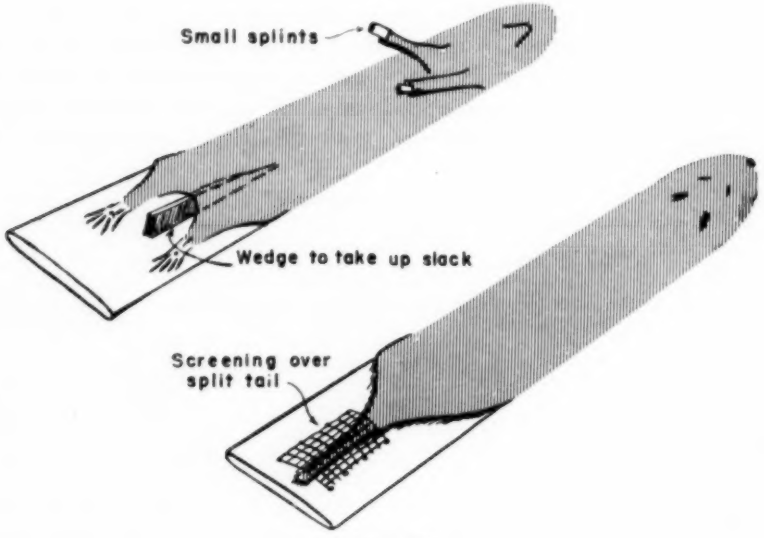



**Figure 41**

### Quality of Furs

The prices you receive for your furs depend on many things. Most important is the fur fashion at that particular time. When fox furs were being worn, a good pelt brought $20. Now the same pelt is worth less than $1. Primeness, condition, size, and care in skinning and pelt preparation also determine the value of a pelt.

### Primeness of Pelts

The term "prime" applied to a pelt refers actually to the *skin* side of the pelt. A prime pelt (looking at the skin side) is white or cream-colored, or, in a muskrat, reddish-brown. An unprime pelt has skin that is bluish or darker, or has blotches of dark areas.

Primeness, even though judged from the skin side, is related to the fur, of course. In an unprime fall pelt the fur, even though it may look all right, is not mature and neither the fur nor the skin has as good working qualities or value as a prime pelt. For this reason, it pays a trapper to take fur bearers only when their pelts are prime.

Water fur bearers (muskrat, beaver) develop primeness *later* than land fur bearers, except for the mink which comes prime in late fall or early winter. In New York State, the main fur animals often seem to be at their peaks of primeness at about the following times, although these times may vary somewhat in different sections of the State:

| Animal | Dates |
|---|---|
| Beaver | February 1 to April 1 |
| Foxes | November 10 to January 1 |
| Mink | November 10 to January 1 |
| Muskrats | January to March |
| Skunk | November 1 to January 1 |
| Raccoon | November 15 to January 1 |

### Condition of pelts

The term *condition* applied to fur pelts refers to the characters of a pelt *other than* primeness. There are many words to describe pelt conditions. A few of them are:

*Springy* – when guard hairs (the long hairs that overlay the shorter underfur) tend to lie flat, because of loss of underfur in late winter.

*Slipped* – often common on pelts that were not completely fleshed and free of grease; slipping of the fur is a sign that the pelt is starting to decay.

*Singed* – furs of raccoon, skunk, mink, or fox caught after late January have a dull, flat appearance due to the breaking of the tips of the guard hairs.

*Rubbed* – pelts that have patches of worn or missing fur.

*Sunburn* – a late winter condition due to fading of guard hairs and even fading of the underfur. Sunburn is particularly common to fox and mink. Muskrats are bothered least by sunburn.

These terms and several more all refer to the *condition* of the pelts. It is possible, then, to have a pelt that is prime (looking at the skin

side), but of poor condition (looking at the fur side). The best protection against poor pelts is to trap the animals early in their period of primeness, and prepare the pelts properly and carefully.

**Size**

If several of your pelts are of equal quality, the larger ones bring the better prices. That is another reason to trap only when the pelts are prime, for your chances of catching young animals are less.

**Care in skinning and pelt preparation**

Even though a pelt may be prime, large, and the fur in excellent *condition,* it will bring little if it has holes and tears or if much fat is left on it. All your work of trapping, skinning, fleshing, and drying will be wasted if you are careless in the preparation of the pelt.

**Marketing**

There are many local fur buyers throughout New York State, and much of the rural fur crop is handled by them. Many trappers send their furs to large fur-buying companies. It is impossible to advise which is the better. Perhaps the thing to do is to try both methods of marketing your fur, then make a choice.

**Questions and Suggestions**

1. Have you sharpened your skinning knife?
2. Are most New York fur bearers sold "open," or "cased"?
3. Should you actually stretch a pelt on a stretching board? Why or why not?
4. Where and how should pelts be dried?
5. What is meant by primeness and condition, and how are they judged?
6. Compare the legal trapping seasons with the table of approximate times of primeness of the more important fur bearers (page 37). Do the trapping seasons make good sense?
7. Arrange for a local fur buyer to talk to your 4-H Club about grading and buying pelts. Ask him to bring samples of well-prepared and poorly prepared pelts, and pelts that are prime and unprime.

## Managing the Fur Crop

TO HAVE a continuous crop of fur animals we must do two things: (1) We must harvest the fur crop wisely, so that breeding stock is always left to produce more fur bearers. Sometimes we must trap severely, as in the case of rabid foxes or when fur bearers do too much agricultural damage; but most of the time, trappers should never try to "trap out" an area. (2) We must help to maintain and enlarge the crop of fur animals, as well as other kinds of wildlife, by improving and protecting the animals' habitats (the places where the animals live). Many measures which are sensible woodland management

or good soil and water management also result in better wildlife habitat.

Requirement 5 of this 4-H Club project is to carry out at least one management practice which will benefit wildlife. Given below are several activities. Some you can do yourself, and some will require the help and cooperation of your parents:

1. Protect fields, hedgerows, woods, and marshes from fire. Fire destroys the food and cover animals must have to live, and often catches the animals themselves. For this item to count in your project, you must definitely do something, such as to plow fire-breaks around woods or plantations or actually to help put out a woods or field fire.

2. Keep cows out of the woodlot. The cows do not produce much milk from grazed areas, and the woods cannot produce much timber when tree seedlings are grazed. With few shrubs and seedlings on the forest floor, animal life suffers from lack of food and cover. For this item to count in this project, you must actually fence the cows out of your woods.

3. Prevent cows from grazing pond, marsh, and stream edges. This is good soil conservation, particularly along stream banks, because cows eat off the soil-holding vegetation and break down the banks. The edges of water areas that are protected may provide valuable food and shelter for wildlife and can be highly productive. For this item to count in the project, you must actually fence off, or help to fence off, the edges of a water area.

4. Improve and repair gullies. Planting trees and shrubs is good soil and water management and also benefits wildlife. Gullies that are steep or large may need check dams or piles of brush or rocks to prevent further erosion.

5. Plant hedgerows, fence lines, or evergreen plantation borders of food-bearing shrubs. If you have completed the *4-H Shrub Border Planting Project,* it will count for the management part of this project.

6. Plant evergreen trees or nut-bearing trees in small blocks. While this practice is of little direct value to fur bearers, it does help provide more good cover for some other kinds of wildlife. If you have completed the *4-H Tree Planting Project* (the Forest 1 project) it will count for the management part of this project.

7. Manage your woodlot to produce timber products. Managing woods means to carry on thinnings, improvement cuttings, and other good forestry practices to create a continually productive woods. Such a woodlot has trees of many kinds and sizes; it is a healthy, vigorous woods, and gives food and cover to many kinds of wildlife. If you have completed the *4-H Woodlot Improvement Project,* it will count for the management part of this project.

8. In shallow sections of a marsh, dig some deeper holes so that muskrats can both summer over and winter over better. Water in these holes should be at least from 2 to 3 feet deep and about 20 feet across.

9. Use wet lands that cannot or should not be drained (or would not be worth draining) for wildlife areas. A marsh created by a low dike can produce quite a crop of muskrats (as many as 10 muskrats per acre per year), and will be used by many other furred and feathered animals. Advice on marsh construction and management may be obtained from your District Game Manager. To obtain count for this project, you must help to build a dike, or to plug a marsh drainage ditch, or to assist the Conservation Department or Soil Conservation men in building a marsh or pond.

10. Create homes for wildlife. Brush piles out of the way in woods or hedgerows, and old pieces of drain tile with one end closed and laid out in woods edges, hedgerows, or marshes, help to solve wildlife housing problems. For this item to count in your project, make at least six such homes (either brush or tile).

### Questions and Suggestions

1. What is meant by *habitat?*

2. What two general things must we do to have a continuous crop of fur animals?

3. The statement is often made, "Good forest management is good wildlife management." Do you think this is true? Can you support your answer?

4. At a 4-H Club meeting, show the *Living Earth* series of films. They tell how soil, water, forests, and wildlife are all related (4 reels, 16mm, color, sound, each reel 15 minutes, obtainable from the Cornell Film Library, Roberts Hall, Ithaca, New York).

5. As a 4-H Club activity, contact your local rod and gun club, and gain their cooperation in carrying out a sound wildlife-management project. Get the advice and assistance of your District Game Manager.

## References

The information in this bulletin was drawn from many people and many publications. Some of the main references used are the following:

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4-H

Project Record

# TRAPPING AND FUR MANAGEMENT

Your name _____. County _____.

Home address _____. Years in Club work _____.

**Requirement 1. Know the trapping laws and the seasons for your part of the State.**

A. Get a copy of the Trapping Laws, read it carefully, and follow the laws.

B. Get a trapping license, unless you are younger than 16, or unless you are trapping *only* on your own land.

C. Fill out the following table, as it applies to your part of the State.

| *Animal* | *Trapping Season* | *Animal* | *Trapping Season* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Beaver | | Otter | |
| Fox | | Raccoon | |
| Mink | | Skunk | |
| Muskrat | | Weasel | |
| Opossum | | | |

Cut on this line

**Requirement 2. Read the trapping project bulletin.**

**Requirement 3. Trap at least one each of three different animals from the list given in requirement 1.**

**Requirement 4. Prepare the pelts properly and record the number of each kind of animal trapped and the price received for the pelts.**

| *Animal* | *No. Caught* | *Price* | *Animal* | *No. Caught* | *Price* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

**Requirement 5. Carry out at least one of the management practices given in this bulletin (pages 38 to 40)**

Write *on the back* of this page exactly what you did to improve conditions for wildlife on your farm.

**Requirement 6. Fill out this record sheet, and return it to your 4-H Club Agent by September 1.**

Project record received and accepted by 4-H Club Agent.

*(Signed)* _____

*(4-H Club Agent)*

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